

12. Sheth Shri Hukamchandji

Sheth Hukamchandji made his personality by his own efforts. He was exceptionally intelligent, highly adventurous and industrious. He contributed very much in the fields of Industrial, Economical, Social and Cultural developments. He is known to be a great man in the world of business and trading. He earned unlimited wealth and property and used it for the up-lift of society and made his name permanent as the savior of the weaker and downtrodden. He was liberal, openhearted, sympathetic, religious and always ready to help the needy. His unparalleled ability and efficiency in business and trading made him famous all over India.

Birth and Childhood:

Sheth Hukamchandji was born in 1875 and after his birth his father went on earning more and more day by day. This was because of the good deeds of the child in his previous birth. Sheth Sarupchandji was his father and Smt. Jabribai was his mother. Sheth Sarupchandji was extraordinarily intelligent. He was very much famous in the world of business. By nature he was free handed, religious minded, studious and regular in habits. Sheth Hukamchandji got all these virtues as an inheritance from his father.

Hukamchandji was clever and intelligent from the childhood. His face was impressive. His power of memory was unusual and hence every member of the family was eager to see him highly learned. He started learning at the age of five years under the teacher Mohanlalji. People were not much tended towards higher studies in those days and hence Hukamchand also got education as other boys of his group. He however, secured religious learning very well. He had made good progress in the field of business and trading by reaching to the age of only fifteen years.

Family Life:

Sheth Hukamchandji had to marry four times. He married four times. His wife Kanchanben was as good as an incarnation of Goddess Laxmi. She had all virtues of sincerity, honesty, sympathy and godly mindedness. She took much interest in helping Shrivikashrams (Abode of Nuns), maternity homes, childcare centers and other serving institutions. She herself supervised the working of these institutions.

Personality of Sheth Hukamchandji:

He was taking exceptional interest in reading spiritual books and religious discourses. He was always pleased to see saints, mendicants and nuns. He invariably respected them all. He loved modern literature also and hence he read many books in Hindi and Gujarati. He used to read new a book almost every day.

He was simple and kind. He was talking at twelfth even with an ordinary man. He took him to be a servant of the people. He was an idol of virtues and restraint in the society of rich. He administered all his business by sitting in his own bungalow.

Business and Trading:

Sheth Hukamchand always thought of success. He was never without hope. He was never pessimistic. His optimistic nature, study of world-over markets and fearlessness in taking up difficult ventures were the main causes of his success. He was, therefore, known as ShethSaheb, Merchant-king and leader of indigenous industries. He changed his business and trading strategies considering the changes in big markets. He was not so rigid in business affairs. There was big marketing of opium in Madhya Pradesh, especially in Indore, in those days. He was deeply involved in it. He earned three crores of rupees in this business and gold and silver began to pour in his house. The

daily newspaper Times of India described him as "Merchant Prince of Malva". But when he went to Mumbai in 1926 for merchandising, he felt that he should not deal with speculative trading and hence he left speculative trading for five years.

Business Life:

The contribution of Sheth Shri Hukamchandji in the industrial development of India is outstanding. He started Hukamchand Mills' nos. 1 and 2, Rajkumar Mills, Jute Mill and many other factories. In addition he opened one-cloth mills and another mills for steel in Calcutta. He said that Khadi hand-woven cotton cloth is the soul of the country because the village people get their livelihood from his business by working in their spare time. Moreover, by adopting Khadi we can stop the flow of money to foreign countries. In keeping this view, he started a factory for preparing Khadi and another mills for crores cloth at Indore and thereby he produced clothe worth Rs. 20 crs. His industrial settlements of many varieties provided livelihood to thousands of poor persons in the country. According to one estimate, there were about 15,000 persons working in his mills and factories. He had earned crores and crores of rupees from his industries by his multi-faced skill, efficiency, ability to stretch out business strategies and unusual power of appreciate market trends all over the country and world.

Humanistic Approach towards Life:

He used much of his money for the up-lift of the society. Those who used their mind, body and wealth for the good of others get the grace of god and honors of the world. One can become great only by the service to humanity. They are worth to be worshiped and respected. Sheth Hukamchandji got constructed magnanimous buildings like Sheesh Mahal, Indra Bhavan, and temple of Itvaria and so on. In addition to this he contributed much for guest-houses, rest-rooms, schools, colleges, boarding houses, Smt. Kanchanbai Shrivakashrams (residing and worship-place for Jain nuns) medicinal clinics, dinner houses, maternity homes etc. He had spent lacs and crores of rupees for the development of society and religious activities.

Religious and Restrained Life-Style:

He was interested in Jainism from his childhood. He was performing worship of Jinendra, doing self-study and religious discourses from his young age. In July 1942, he was honored for his services to the society at the time of celebrations of Ashtahnika festival named Shanti Mangal Vidhan at Indore and while replying for this honor he had said, "I have deep faith in Jainism and I have progressed in life because of this faith, study and thinking by self in Jainism, by the company of Jain Saints, mendicants, detached persons and Jain friends". He remained busy in regularly discussing the issues of Jainism for about 50 years of his life. He honored saints and Shravakas (Jain family-holders). He purified his soul by various good deeds and paved way to heaven in the next life. He did not consider much o worldly happiness and he was passing almost detached and simple life in spite of so much wealth and honors.

Respected Acharya Shri ShantiSagarji Maharaj was also deeply impressed of the personality of Sheth Shri Hukamchandji when the former came to Indore with his disciples and followers. Sheth Hukamchandji, once, went to have Darshan (seeing) of Acharya Shri ShantiSagarji even though he had acute fever. He was more worried for the welfare of Jain saints and mendicants. He had visited Songadh in Saurashtra which the place of pilgrimage for Digambar Jains for more then three times. He had deep attachment for Kanji Swamy. He donated about one lac of rupees for construction of study hall and Jain Temple at Songadh.

Once there was trouble for the holy place of Samet Shikharji, which is the most important place of pilgrimage for Digambar Jains. The British had decided to have permanent residences there. The Jains were greatly disturbed of this decision. Sheth Hukamchand himself went bare-footed from

Indore to Samet Shikharji with prominent persons of Jain community and told the British that if they do not mind the protest of Jains against establishing the residences of British at Samet Shikharji holy place, the position will go worse. The British, then, put off the proposal. Thenafter the Jain community decided to buy the whole mountain including the holy place of Samet Shikharji so that such a trouble may no arise in future. For this, the Jain community gave Rs.5000/- and further Rs.25000/- was collected from Indore.

It was his great task to be in the service of Jain religion and Jain community. He had divided this great work into four parts: (i) Service to holy places of Jainism (ii) to solve the problems arising against these holy places. Jain saints, mendicants and against the Jain religion (iii) To remove internal differences of various groups of Jain community and (iv) To establish institutions and help such institutions.

The history of the progress of Digambar Jain community from 1900 to 1950 AD is well connected with the life of Sheth Hukamchandji. He purchased land between Indore and Indore Cantonment in 1903 and a magnanimous Jinalaya (Jain Temple) of Lord Parshvanath was constructed thereon. He called for efficient workers from Iran and Jaipur for construction of the grand Itwariya Jain Temple. Most of the working this temple is from glass. There are beautiful pictures from colorful glass and these pictures include therein Siddhshetra, Samavasaran, Trimblik, (i.e. three godly words), Nandishwar Dwip, an eye-view of heaven, SaptaVyasana, Ashtakarm etc. The devotees become deeply moved by viewing them. It is because of this reason that Indore is said to be the city of holy places: a place of pilgrimage or TirthaNagari.

Sheth Hukamchandji had helped the people of Indore who were suffering from plague. He started a boarding house and Jains were being given meals at a charge of Rs. 100 per month. He was elected as a President of a conference at Palitana in 1914 and he had declared therein to donate Rs. 4,00,000 for the welfare of Jain community.

In 1918, he had donated Rs. 4,00,000 for the Lady Harding Medical Hospital of Delhi. He has never discriminated between Jains and non-Jains while contributing for teaching institutions. He had purchased a building at the cost of Rs. 25,000 for starting a school therein. He had donated in several other teaching institutions very freely and liberally.

Sad Demise:

Sheth Shri Hukamchandji, thus, served the society, religion and industry for more than fifty years continuously. He passed away from us on February 26, 1959 AD. We can pay him our homage only by following his ideals.